

RICHARD LAYMAN

*A Readiness to Attempt Great Things:  
John Dos Passos's First Novel*

By the summer of 1917, when John Dos Passos wrote the chapters reprinted here, he was firmly committed to a life of creative expression, though he was uncertain whether he wanted to focus his energies on literature or art. While a student at Harvard (class of 1916) he enrolled in the celebrated composition classes taught by Charles Townsend Copeland and Dean Le Barron Russell Briggs, taken previously by such writers as T.S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Conrad Aiken, S.N. Behrman, John Reed, Robert Benchley, J.P. Marquand, Gilbert Seldes, and Van Wyck Brooks, to name a few. In Dean Briggs' class during his senior year, Dos Passos wrote a novellette that he called "Afterglow" about the challenge to a young man of breaking free from the influence of his formidable parents and forging a life for himself. That theme, or something like it, seemed to obsess him for at least the next decade. It is the bedrock upon which his first four published novels were built, and it is at the heart of *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho*, his unpublished first attempt at a full-blown novel. While at Harvard, Dos Passos had served on the staff of *The Harvard Monthly*, a university publication devoted to literature and the arts, and he was a founding member of the Harvard Poetry Society in 1915. He celebrated his graduation from college in 1916 with his first book publication in *Eight Harvard Poets*, a privately financed collection from *The Harvard Monthly* that included works by e. e. cummings and fellow Harvard Poetry Society member Robert Hillyer.

After he left Harvard, Dos Passos spent a semester in Madrid in postgraduate study of art and architecture at the Centro de Estudios Históricos, before his father's death and the escalation of the war in Europe brought him back to the United States. In that unsettling year when the nation

was agonizing over its position in world affairs, Dos Passos was energized with revolutionary fervor. A historian at heart even then, he found the attraction of the war undeniable, though he was a committed pacifist. He feared that the war machine, fueled by capitalist greed, would destroy the ancient treasures of art and architecture along with the creative spirit they represented. Dos Passos felt what he called “bitter hatred and savage joy”: hatred for the destructiveness of the war, and joy in the challenge to “make eternal” as he put it, his view of the world he lived in, as the great figures of Western culture had done before him.

The first weeks Dos Passos spent in France during the war were given over to training. Paris was a raucous, chaotic place that he enjoyed anxiously. Modernism—in art, music, literature, and dance—inspired him. On 31 July 1917 he wrote in his diary: “I’m dying to write—but all my methods of doing things in the past merely disgust me now, all former methods are damned inadequate—the stream of sensation flows by—I suck it up like a sponge—my reactions are a constant weather vane—a little whimsical impish—giggling—sneering at tragedy—Horror is so piled on horror that there can be no more—Despair gives place to delirious laughter—” He had company. The Norton-Harjes Corps was like a gentleman’s social club. Hillyer was there, and so was Cummings. They met other Harvard classmates among the volunteer unit that drew heavily on Ivy League graduates and made new friends with literary aspirations, notably aspiring playwright John Howard Lawson. For them, wartime France was in large part an aesthetic experience that provided them material and a conducive environment for their creative works.

On 15 August 1917, about six weeks after he arrived in France, Dos Passos wrote in his diary:

—Have been amusing myself in three ways

1. Writing a novel with Bobs
  2. Eating & drinking omelets & white wine
  3. Having wonderful naval fights with fleets of paper boats on the brook—
- Tomorrow we go to the Front to a devilish hot section

Dos Passos was twenty-one when he began his collaborative novel with Robert Hillyer, whom he called “Bobs.” Over three weeks in August and September 1917 they wrote the first eleven chapters of the novel in 6½ x 8½ copybooks that they passed back and forth, each editing the other’s work. Dos Passos wrote chapters One, Three, Five, Eight and Ten. In mid-September, the Norton-Harjes corps was disbanded and absorbed into the American Red Cross. Hillyer went home, leaving the novel behind. Dos Passos stayed and continued writing, as time allowed. Over the next eighteen months he wrestled with *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho*, trying to shape the modernist novel he envisioned.

In spring 1918 a censor spotted revolutionary comments in one of Dos Passos’s letters and reported him. The result was a summer’s suspension from the corps in Paris before he was given the option to resign and return to the United States or to stay and be expelled for disloyalty. He resigned in Fall 1918 and returned home, where he spent a month writing restlessly before joining the U.S. Army Medical Corps in the last days of the war. He debarked for England on 19 November 1918, the day after the armistice with Germany was signed. By that time, he had revised *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* again and had converted a discarded part into what would be his first published *One Man’s Initiation—1917* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920). On board ship, he reshaped another part into a war novel he first called *Sack of Corinth* and later titled *Three Soldiers* (New York: Doran, 1921).

During demobilization, Dos Passos was stationed in Paris. He took advantage of a soldiers’ educational program to enroll briefly in anthropology classes at the Sorbonne, but much of his time before he left the army in summer 1918 was spent putting final touches on what were now his three novels. On 1 October 1919, Dos Passos sent the last part of *Seven Times Round the*

*Walls of Jericho* to his agent. By his own report, he had revised the novel four times. That spring he turned the manuscripts for *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* and *One Man's Initiation—1917* over to a New York agent, Brandt and Kirkpatrick. The next year, he completed *Three Soldiers*. Both of the early novels were circulated in New York and rejected repeatedly. Dos Passos himself managed to place *One Man's Initiation—1917* with an English publisher (who sold 63 copies in the first six months after publication). *Three Soldiers* was published in 1921 to reviews that hailed him as a leading novelist of the postwar generation, and Dos Passos's career was effectively launched. But his first full-length novel was never published, though Knopf and Boni & Liveright expressed interest. In time, Dos Passos forgot about it.

*Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* exists in two forms in the Dos Passos Papers at the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia—the heavily revised manuscript in twenty-two copybooks, and the typescript of 430 pages revised from the manuscript and with further holograph revisions. Ruth Strickland, whose dissertation at the University of South Carolina included an edition of the novel and is the best source of information about it, believes the typescript was prepared by professional typists and by Dos Passos himself. She thinks the first and third chapters, presented here, were typed by a professional and that chapter two, originally written by Hillyer, was retyped by Dos Passos, revising as he went.

The title refers to the beginning of the Old Testament book of Joshua, in which the prophet assumes the place of Moses as leader of the Children of Israel. Joshua leads the Israelites across the river Jordan to Jericho, that had been promised his people by the Lord. At the Lord's instruction, he waits outside the walls of the city for seven days, and on the seventh day leads the people around the walls seven times, whereupon the walls tumble down and the city is given over without battle to the Chosen Ones. The biblical story was Dos Passos's metaphor for the promise

available to the Chosen People of his generation—the creators, the aesthetics, such as Martin Howe, the protagonist of *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho*.

Dos Passos introduces three striking literary devices in these opening chapters. First is the theme of truthfulness, expressed by young Martin's confusion between literal truth and what he calls the truth of adults. It is drawn from "Afterglow," the novelette Dos Passos wrote in Dean Briggs' class. Martin Howe's nickname "Fibbie" suggests that his struggle to synthesize fact and the truth found in fancy will be his life's work. Second is the imagery of the moon as a place of escape, reminding Martin Howe of a drum that he can beat to declare his individuality and his independence. That image foreshadows Dos Passos's revolutionary play *The Moon Is a Gong*, (produced in 1925) retitled *The Garbage Man* (New York: Harper, 1926). He had begun discussing the idea for that play with John Howard Lawson, also a budding playwright, in France during the war. Third is the narrative technique. At times, *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* reads like an impressionistic memoir told from the present of the novel as the narrator matures. Dos Passos experimented with that technique, among other fictional ways of seeing, in all of his early novels. Despite being in the third person, the narrative technique of *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* particularly foreshadows the first-person Camera's Eye sections of the *USA Trilogy*, the first volume of which was published a decade later.

The autobiographical influence in the novel is strong. Like Martin Howe, Dos Passos was raised by his mother, attended boarding school, then entered Harvard. Like Martin Howe, Dos Passos rebelled against the traditional conservatism of his father. Like Martin Howe, Dos Passos was attracted by the revolutionary spirit of Greenwich Village before the war and determined there to go to Europe as a volunteer. A fictional version of that scene ends the novel in its final revision.

*Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho* is an apprentice work, to be sure. It lacks the sophisticated structure and the thematic focus of Dos Passos's published novels. But it is a rich expression of the intellectual depth, the experimental fervor, and the cultural sensitivity that made John Dos Passos among the very best modernist creative artists.

JOHN DOS PASSOS

*Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho*

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following comprise the first three chapters of the previously unpublished John Dos Passos novel *Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho*; the section heading for this portion of the novel is *Part 1: The Moon is a Drum*. In our transcription of the work we have tried, wherever possible, to remain true to the original manuscript. The unique and often idiomatic spellings of words, the running together of phrases and thoughts, and the combination of English and American usage are part of the author's style and vision. It has been our intention to adhere to what we presume were his wishes.

Our profound gratitude to Alderman Library's Special Collections for their assistance in procuring and reprinting this work.

## Chapter I

The long white streamers of the nurse's cap fluttered in the sharp spring wind. The little boy, whom she held tightly by the hand, felt dragged along by the swirl of her voluminous skirt over which the starched apron bellied like the sail of a boat in a picture book, as if by a limp balloon that would suddenly whip him above the grey sparkling city street and carry him off to strange lands, perhaps the moon . . . He was wandering in fancy about a landscape where the mountains were of green cheese and the rivers of raspberry shrub when he noticed the tall portal of a building above their heads. The nurse pulled the cap roughly from his head, and, just catching a glimpse of the sparrows that chirruped about the head of a greenish-gray lady who stood pressed against the central post of the portal, he was dragged through a winging baize door into the dark, where lights gleamed through a grey mist of incense and distant voices droned like bees in a hayfield. With footsteps awed to tiptoe he followed his nurse's diminished swirl of garments across a slippery perilous pavement.

He was in a church, where God lived, or at least where God frequently visited. Of course he'd been to church before, lots of times, but the full significance of it had only dawned on him recently. He had asked his mother about it and she had told him a vague story about someone with a fair beard who had been very good and kind long ago and whom people had hurt dreadfully, and who loved little boys, that is good little boys who minded what was told them. Marie had been more stimulating. She told him that the good God lived in every church in the world amid swarms of angels and held the world in the palm of his hand, and that every day at mass, when the little bell tinkled, the dome above the altar melted into a cloud of angels and the good God came in person and listened to the prayers of the priest. The little boy had asked what



he looked like, but she had put him off by terrifyingly announcing that none could see God and live. And that was why everybody kneeled down and closed their eyes so very tight when the priests rang the little bell. But how wonderful it must be to see God and his angels. God's angels must be much more beautiful than those that watch all night beside one's bed. Then he thought of the awful fate of Peeping Tom of Coventry; but it was Lady Godiva Tom looked at, not God.

While all this was going on in his head the little boy was kneeling beside his nurse on a rush chair, his arms resting on the slanting board on the back. His fingers moved nervously over the dark surface of the wood, worn mellow by the pressure of many hands moist with prayer. Suddenly he was surprised by the little bell that tinkled. Out of unaccountable bravado he stayed with his chin resting on the wooden bar, his eyes fixed on the great altar, dimly gold in the distance, where moved the vast embroidered backs of the priests. The bell's tinkle died away, leaving a faint echo to whine for a moment in the dark vaulting. Amid the stillness he could feel the faint rustle of devotion of the kneeling figures in front of him. His heart seemed to stop beating. He felt all the terrified expectancy he had felt not long ago when he had had his picture taken, and the photographer had said he'd use flashlight, and he had stood trembling with fear in anticipation of the brilliance of it.

A loud sonorous sound close at hand startled him. It was Marie blowing her nose while her head with its white starched cap remained reverently bowed. The little boy closed his eyes so tight the lids hurt. When he opened them again, cautiously, things were going on as usual at the altar. Priests shambled about monotonously. From the side aisles came a scrape of feet as people went out. A fat woman with black mittens on her hands leaned over Marie and whispered hoarsely.

He was glad to get out when Marie led him from the church into the soft cloudiness of the April day. His heart was filled with a surprised desolation. Where could God have been, then? Or perhaps he had known that he, Martin Howe, was peeping and had told his angels that he would stay at home that Sunday. Or perhaps he had made himself invisible. But then why ring the little bell? A perplexed sense of emptiness came over him, as when he looked out of the window on a misty night, when you couldn't see the dark spangled velvet of the sky comfortably enclosing the cosy world, and everything seemed empty as if there were nothing there at all. But maybe Marie had made it all up about God. He remembered once when Mother had found her telling him about the Loup Garou and had shut her up, telling Nurse that if she frightened the child with her lies she'd have to take a month's notice. Dear, how many fibs people did tell.

But his philosophic musings were interrupted by their passing a chocolate shop, a window piled with all manner of alluring shapes, brown candies, lemon yellow candies, little loud-colored vegetables in almond paste. His thoughts went off on a new track; in the moon the mountains were of almond paste, a friend of Mother's had told him, and the trees of sugar candy, and the rivers of raspberry shrub. Assuredly when he grew up he'd go to the moon, and he'd take Marie, dear Marie—he pressed himself into the folds of her voluminous dress and he walked beside her—and Mother in her new silk ball gown. But Marie had said the moon was made of green cheese . . . He deliberately pinched her hand as hard as he could. And while she was delivering the usual lecture on his naughtiness, he thought sadly of the number of fibs people told; how could the same moon be of almond paste and of green cheese?

That night after Nurse had left him and Mother had sung her perfunctory little song and kissed him hastily and gone off with a rustle of the new silk ball-gown to some dim function known as a Reception, he stood in his bare feet on the cold floor at the bedroom window and

gave the moon a careful first-hand inspection. No, it wasn't of green cheese, no green cheese could rise so easily above the complicated roofs of town. It was more like a toy balloon, not so shiny to be sure, but a toy balloon out in the rain and mist the way the moon was would be sure to get the polish off it. All at once an idea struck him. In the library was an Indian drum; the moon had just the same stained and moth-nibbled look. The big patch had once been a buffalo and the rain had washed the paint off. And when he grew up big and strong he'd go up in a balloon and get on the edge of the moon and beat it and beat it. How fine it would be! Mother and Nurse wouldn't be able to get up there to stop him, not even if they sent for a Policeman or the Bogey Man, as had been threatened before when he had been naughty. He'd beat so hard he'd scare them all away; then he'd eat up the barley sugar trees and the almond paste mountains . . . O dear, but if the moon's an Indian drum, it can't be made of candy, can it?

"Honest to goodness Suzanne, I did," he was saying in an earnest whisper to Marie's little girl.

"I think it was naughty of you."

"Don't care if it was;" he stuck out his tongue at the chair they were seated beside, pretending for the moment it was Marie. "I just jumped out of the window and landed plunk beside the moon on a nice soft cloud, and I beat and beat, and Mother and Nurse and four hundred policemen tried to stop me. You ask Marie if they didn't. And I drummed and drummed until I got sleepy and tumbled into bed. And if you don't believe it I'll never never speak to you again, Suzanne."

Suzanne jumped to her feet, tossing the plait of pale mousecolored hair off her shoulder.

"All right I believe you."

He got up and put his arm round her shoulder.

“No I don’t,” she cried shrilly, making a face at him; then she danced away mockingly; “I’ll tell your maman; Madame Howe, Madame Howe, Martin’s telling fibs again, he’s telling fibs again.”

Full of sinking bitterness the little boy sat down in the big arm chair he and Suzanne had been hiding beside. It was wicked to tell fibs; why did he do it? Why did other people do it?

Still he would go beat on the moon like a drum just to show them, the horrid fibbers. He felt a sudden exhilarating hate of everybody. He could picture himself far up above their scoldings and their prohibitions, beating out tunes they had to dance to, beating such rhymes out of the drum of the moon that everyone would pile out of the dark houses and fill the streets and climb on the roofs and on the zigzag chimney-pots to look at him; and then Mother would come rustling home from a Reception and the sweet scent of her gloves would reach him as he beat on the moon, and he’d jump down into her arms and would go home with her very meekly between ranks of thunder-struck townspeople. Boom, boom, boom, he shouted in his excitement. What fun it would be like a drum to beat a tune on the moon.

“When you’re talking to yourself, you’re talking to the Devil,” came Suzanne’s voice from the door in a singsong tone of mockery. Then she ran off downstairs crying: “Fib-teller, Fibbie, Fibbie.”

## Chapter II

The young man was very wet; streams ran down his coat and pattered on the floor. He held a big bulging valise covered with colored pieces of paper. The little boy who had stolen downstairs noticed these and would have liked to ask about them, but he did not dare, for fear they would send him back to bed again. He felt a little safe, though, in that he had taken the precaution of putting on his new pink wrapper and slippers with bunnies on them; but one was never really safe. If he proved he was not catching cold, they would find some other equally absurd reason for sending him back to bed. It would be terrible to have to go now, such interesting things were happening. The young man had started to kiss Mother and she had pushed him back. The young man looked very sad and said,

“You needn’t treat me like a stranger, Sis. I don’t see why you can’t let all that drop for a while . . . now.”

Fibbie saw Mother stand very straight as if she were going to scold; but instead she turned to him and said, very gently,

“Martin, dear, this is your uncle James.”

The young man looked as though he did not know what to say; so Fibbie said, reassuringly,

“O yes, I know you . . . Mother used to talk all about you to Granma, and she used to cry. Are you really Uncle James?”

“Yes I really am. What do you think of me?”

The question so frightened the little boy that he stood twisting his wrapper up into a hard knot. He was almost glad when Mother said, “Now go back to bed dearie.”

Although he could not go to sleep, he was not so frightened as he usually was in his dark lonely bedroom, where the inexorable clock went tick-tack, tick-tack in a terrifying singsong. Tonight there was so much to think of. What was it Mother had said? "It is strange, all of our family die in November." And outside the wind of November moaned down the street, at times almost drowning the voice of the clock. And downstairs it was all dark except for Granma's room, and every now and then, above a gust of wind, he could hear a door slam. Then all at once he was dreaming, and Granma was there, and Uncle James, and Marie and Suzanne, all in new pink wrappers and slippers with bunnies on them.

Next day was a holiday for Fibbie; everybody seemed to have forgotten all about him. All during the morning people passed and repassed through the hall that led to Granma's room. Fibbie sat in a corner of the stairs watching, all hunched up, fascinated, terrified by the faint odor of spice and flowers that was stealing through the house. Finally Mother came to him.

"Do you wish to see Grandmother, dearie?"

Fibbie didn't dare answer but followed her swift steps.

Someone whispered,

"No, no don't let him in yet, she isn't ready; it would frighten him."

But Fibbie walked in. The shades were drawn and everything was damp and dim like the cellar. The room was much more frightening than the little white figure that lay there on a stretcher with thin grey hair falling about its shriveled neck, and stiff hands holding air. It was the furniture that frowned and threatened. The desk where he had sat and played with china dogs while Granma took her nap was like a tightly shut mouth, angry. He spied the little clock on the mantle-piece, a fat little round clock that always seemed to smile at him. No one remonstrated when he reached up and took it.

“The dear little fellow wants some intimate memento of her.”

Then Mother took his hand and continued,

“That is not Granma whom you see lying there. This is only like a cast-off garment. She, she herself, is waiting for us in a happier. . . “ Mother’s words ended in a sob, and she pressed her handkerchief to her mouth very hard.

“But the clay is very dear. That is all we can know. The rest is nothing to us.” Fibbie suddenly noticed that Uncle James was in the- room. But everyone seemed angry at Uncle James for what he had said. They pushed the little boy out into the hall and closed the door carefully. He kissed the little clock and lay down on the stairs to count the ticks. He had hardly counted ten when he fell asleep.

The last time he saw his grandmother she was lying all beautiful on satin cushions with the lovely familiar tortoise-shell comb in her hair. Tall candles burned round her. Fibbie said, “Look at me, look at me.” He knew that she wouldn’t, so he tried to open her eyes. They were limp and dull. He stole out of the room and would not be induced to return. Suddenly he cried. He was thinking how terribly long it would be before his birthday came again and he would have another cake in the rosegarden.

### Chapter III

The nursery wall had as long as Fibbie remembered been covered with a demure grey paper, on which, when you undressed at night, your arms and the rocking-chair on which you piled your clothes cast mocking and lugubrious shadows. Early one morning in this same November, when he was lying in bed very warm and comfortable under the covers waiting for Nurse to shuffle in wrapped in her old black shawl and tell him to get up, he heard an unfamiliar foot on the stairs; and before he had time to look towards the door instead of out the window, where he had been watching the clouds skid by, torn into shreds by the lashing wind that sharpened almost to a polish the steely blue sky, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Uncle James in a slightly disordered dress suit who stood over him with a pale smiling face.

“Hello, Fibbie, comment ça va?”

“Tres bien Monsieur;” Fibbie flushed with the effort of answering in French.

“So Marie does teach you something after all.”

Fibbie rolled about uneasily in bed, and at last sat up, and drawing the sheet up to his chin said,

“You’re up early.”

“Well it’s not exactly that.” Uncle James smiled broadly with a sudden sunniness that made Fibbie think of wide green fields full of daisies. “I thought I’d like to come and chat a bit. Has anyone ever told you about the Vikings and the Swan Path?”

Fibbie shook his head with a puzzled pursing of the lips.

“I’ve just been reading the sagas. You see that’s why I’m so excited.” Uncle James sat on the edge of the bed, swinging his legs just as if he were a little boy of six, like Fibbie. “The Vikings



lived in the north and were great drinkers and had long golden beards; and they used to sail over the sea in black ships and drink mead out of bull's horns all carved and gilded. I'd like to have lived then, wouldn't you Fibbie?"

The little boy nodded doubtfully.

"O yes you would. And when you died they put you on your black ship in your fierce horned helmet, and set it afire and you went floating out to sea like a blazing sunset . . ."

For a moment Fibbie had an eerie picture of his grandmother, marblewhite, floating slowly out on a flaming sea in a great black ship that had tall candles instead of masts. The thought ought to make him cry he told himself, but he giggled softly.

Uncle James paced the room in great excitement meanwhile.

"I'd like to draw you a Viking ship," he said; "got any paper?"

Fibbie shook his head, drawing his knees up to his chin and sitting all hunched up in a little hill of bedclothes.

"I know, by gorry, this wall needs something to keep the shadows from getting creepy, doesn't it?"

In awed wonder Fibbie watched his uncle draw a stub of charcoal from his pocket and commence, with a queer little scraping sound, to draw heavy black lines on the grey wall paper.

"But Uncle James, Marie'll scold you, she did me dreadfully," he remonstrated.

"Don't you worry, I can handle Marie." The lines were growing into a most astonishing ship with a row of shields about the gunwale and above it the bearded faces and horned helmets of Vikings.

At that moment Fibbie heard the shuffle of Marie's feet on the stairs. Now he'll catch it, he said to himself, snuggling back to bed to avoid implication.

Marie stopped at the door, nervously jerking at her shawl. Meanwhile at the bow of the boat the swaggering figure of a man was growing out of the swift crunching strokes, of a man holding with one hand a horn high above his head.

“Pardon, Monsieur,” said Marie.

Without turning round Uncle James poured out what seemed to Fibbie a torrent of jumbled words—laughing all the while, completely drowning the astonished woman in the stream of his French.

“There, it’s finished!” he cried at last, popping the charcoal back into his dress vest. “So long Fibbie, don’t forget the Vikings.” As he passed Marie, he pressed something into her hand that made her smile; then his steps could be heard as he ran downstairs to his own room. Marie’s smile faded into a grumble as she entered the room, telling Fibbie to get up Master Martin else “*Madame ta mère sera très mécontente,*” and with cruel deliberation pulled the bedclothes off him, leaving him a cold little figure in pink striped pyjamas, stretching out his arms over the ruffled sheet.

Fibbie was seated in the bay-window of the parlor, his legs with their ribbed stockings awed into stillness by the silence and the multifarious majesty of the room, where he was rarely allowed to go. He watched the lemon-yellow lights climb up the street popping on in one lamp post after another, emphasizing the cold violet of the slanting twilight street and the ruddiness of the lighted windows of the houses opposite. He dreaded the long lonely hours before bedtime. He could faintly smell the savour of dinner cooking for the grownup people, not for him; soon he and Marie and Suzanne would be having a light supper in the nursery. A new smell made him turn round. The French nurse, her old wrinkled face, usually puckered with the expression of

having just tasted something sour, a bouquet of smiles, was standing beside him, her eyes strangely young and glowing. He recognized that the peculiar smell was from her breath.

“Mon petit chou-chou,” she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him moistly on the mouth. “You thought your nursie had deserted you, and left you all alone. didn’t you? I was out buying Suzanne a nice new dress. And Fibbie, I bought you a little box of bonbons, only you mustn’t tell Madame ta mère. She’d be angry. Come up to the nursery. I’ve lighted a fire and we’ll be cosy.”

He followed her up the steep narrow steps with their gleaming mahogany rail, feeling a little disturbed by something he could not understand in Nurse’s good humor, and in the unwonted springiness of her step. But it was so pleasant to sit by the fire sucking a pink candy between two fingers and the fingers with the candy, that he soon forgot his constraint. And then Marie was marvelously expansive; the flow of her talk was unbroken. The firelight glowed on her flushed cheeks and rather bulbous nose until they were red as raw steak.

Master Martin’s Uncle James was such a generous young gentleman. There were no “jeunes gens” nowadays who had such manners and such ways. He was more like the young gentlemen who used to visit her mistress’s box at the opera in the “beaux vieux jours” when she was a lady’s maid in Paris. So she wandered on until Fibbie completely lost track of what she was saying, dazed by the pictures of unimagined things she brought before him. Then she came back to her starting point: “how generous his Uncle James was; what a shame that he didn’t get along with Madame, and his poor dear mother”—she stopped to dab her eyes with her handkerchief—“it was all due to opinions; how sad it was. But she should understand that all generous young men were “un peu étrange” in their opinions; it was as it should be. Later they would marry and

forget all that. Blood was thicker than opinions anyway. How sad it was; and did Master Martin know his mother had not left him one centime in the will? It was truly an outrage.”

The old woman buried her face in her hands, leaning her old grey head so far over that the firelight shone through it and gave the starched cap a rosy color. Fibbie, a little frightened, sat very stiff in the chair beside her, watching the back of her black bodice where several hooks were undone, rise and fall with her sobs. Suddenly she jumped up and went out of the room for a moment. The strange odor was stronger than ever on her breath when she came back, but she was very gay and sang him merry little French songs in her old cracked voice. She even took his two hands and made him dance with her on the hearthrug, which was lots of fun and made him quite forget the strangeness of her behavior. At last she sank panting to the floor and he danced round her clapping his hands and shouting.

They had just put more wood on the fire, to make the flames big and strong Marie said, that they might dance too, when Mother came in, an annoyed line in her white soft forehead.

“Marie,” she said sharply, “what’s the matter?”

Fibbie felt suddenly a horrid burning shame, he did not know why.

“Rien Madame, rien Madame;” the cap bobbed up and down in the fireshot twilight of the room. “I was playing a little with dear Master Martin.”

“Come here, Martin.” He went to her shyly; Mother touched his cheek with her hand. “Why, he’s all hot and wringing with perspiration. Marie, how did you let the child get in this state? . . . Fibbie, dear,” she turned to him coolly, “please go and get my glasses; they are in a black leather case on the parlor table. Don’t hurry back, I want you to get cool gradually.”

As the little boy went sullenly downstairs he could hear voices raised in altercation. When he got back Marie was very tearful and contrite. The sides of her nose and her old red wrinkled cheeks glistened with tears.

“All right Marie, I’ll let it pass this time,” Mother was saying, weighing each word with cold cruelty, “on account of your age and previous good service, but if, under this roof, you ever again touch a drop . . . O Martin dear, thank you;” she smiled at him with unusual warmth. Then she continued, “You may go now. We won’t need you any more this evening. Tomorrow morning I want you to pack Mr. Clough’s trunk. He’s just telephoned asking us to send it to him at Edgartown.”

“Why, Mother, is Uncle James going away?”

“Yes dear.” The pretty curves of her cheeks hardened. “It’s rude to interrupt, Martin.”

When Mother took him up to bed that night, Fbbie noticed that a picture had been hung over the place where Uncle James had drawn the Viking Ship. Only the hand of the man on the prow, the hand that held the drinking horn, appeared red above the dark oak frame.